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ABSTRACT

Practical strategies for implementing a skill-centered approach to reading instruction are discussed in this paper. The first two strategies presented pertain to the beginning implementation stage: making a commitment to a skills approach and paying attention to principles for educational change. Sections are included on whole-staff involvement in the whole-school reading program, maintaining the whole-school reading program, and refining the whole-school reading program. Emphasis is placed on the importance of inservice work in implementing the program. (MKM)

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STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING
SKILL-BASED READING INSTRUCTION

by

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Report from the Project on
Studies in Language: Reading and Communication

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Abstract

This paper presents some practical strategies for implementing a skill-centered approach to reading instruction. The first two strategies pertain to the beginning implementation stage: making a commitment to a skills approach, and paying attention to principles for educational change. We stress the need for school personnel to make a conscious decision to make skills the basis of their curriculum, since in many school settings materials, instead, are the basis.

We discuss the importance of observing principles for change because we believe that current inservice work, which centers mainly on specific skill-centered materials, is inadequate. Teachers need to be better prepared for the personal changes in teaching styles, responsibilities, and management and instructional techniques that they must make to use a skill-centered approach.

In the section on whole-staff involvement in the whole-school reading program, we talk in detail about two kinds of inservice sessions--those to inform (pertaining to use of materials) and those to involve (pertaining to preparing teachers for change). We also discuss implementation issues that naturally arise in schools using a skill-centered approach, and present three specific issues that commonly develop: pacing implementation steps, problem solving, and scheduling planning time and progress reports. We suggest that these issues can be resolved relatively easily, if they are addressed early instead of avoided until they become sources of major controversy.

Inservice work is also a topic at the third implementation stage. We emphasize the importance of continuing to develop the program and suggest some topics administrators might wish to cover in inservice meetings. In this stage we also talk about skill application and evaluation--two strategies frequently underused in maintaining focused skill instruction. We explain the role skill application plays in skill retention, how it differs from developmental instruction, and why it must be an integral part of content area teaching. We discuss both informal and formal procedures for evaluation, and offer ideas for carrying out either procedure.

In the last section we talk about refining the whole-school reading program and addressing experienced users of skill-centered approaches, who are accustomed to planning for a variety of instructional arrangements. We remind administrators to continue to pace their implementation according to the teachers' needs, and suggest ways to enhance the application strategies discussed earlier.

Combining all of these strategies and constantly improving them are the best ways to achieve a successful implementation of skill-centered teaching.

Practical strategies for implementing a skill-centered approach to teaching reading are presented in this paper. Several sections, each with a special emphasis, offer guidelines for teaching skills in an elementary setting. The first section deals with a "pre-implementation" stage. Here we discuss the role of skills in the whole-school reading program. We emphasize the need for school personnel to make a commitment to a skill-centered approach, to make skills the basis of their reading program, and to acknowledge that this commitment will require change within the school. Much of the change involves the staff's management and teaching procedures and curriculum organization. The importance of paying attention to well-rounded principles for educational change is stressed, and selected principles are identified and explained.

The second section covers beginning implementation strategies, which concern total staff involvement in the whole-school reading program. We stress the critical role of inservice sessions aimed both at informing teachers (thoroughly familiarizing them with the specific materials of a skill-centered approach) and involving them (discussing the necessary changes in individual teaching styles).

We also present a number of implementation issues which develop in the schools. These issues, which can be easily addressed during inservice work, include appropriate pacing of implementation, setting up a school problem-solving mechanism, and scheduling teachers' progress reports and planning time.

In the third section we discuss strategies for maintaining the whole-school reading program. We stress the importance of (a) continuing inservice work to update experienced staff and to inform new staff, (b) providing opportunities for skill application, and (c) carrying out evaluation procedures, such as providing both positive and negative feedback to teachers and letting them assume responsibility for identifying and solving implementation problems as they arise. Ideas for carrying out a formal evaluation are also included.

In the final section we discuss refinement of the whole-school reading program. General strategies, such as pacing skills instruction in the classroom, integrating reading skills into the total curriculum, and continually re-examining goals, are emphasized.

Skills in the Whole-school Reading Program

Before implementing a skill-based approach, the commitment of the whole staff to adopting skills as the basis of the reading program must be secured. Quite frequently, before such a commitment is made, materials rather than skills are considered the framework for the reading curriculum, and instruction is based on the content of one or several basal readers. To evolve a commitment to using skills as a curriculum basis, the persons responsible for initiating and managing implementation must recognize that preparing for implementation includes preparing for change. Staff members need to be advised, for example, that different teaching procedures are necessary and that the staff will participate in establishing these new procedures. To successfully make skills an integral

part of the whole-school reading program, planners need to acknowledge this process and observe basic key principles of positive change.

Commitment to a Skill-based Approach

A beginning step in implementing a skill-centered approach is for the planners, perhaps the principal and a specially appointed reading committee, to decide to make skills the basis of their reading program.

Why skills? School planners should thoroughly discuss their commitment to change from materials to skills as the curriculum basis. In the majority of school settings, materials are presently the basis of the instructional program. Many teachers view reading skills as only one aspect of their multifaceted reading curriculum. They see their curriculum as a composite of several separate programs, which may include a basal reader series, a phonics-oriented program, a general comprehension development kit, a skills program (such as the Wisconsin Design), and miscellaneous commercial or teacher-made worksheets and games. These teachers consider this assortment of reading materials, rather than reading skills and objectives, the core of their reading program.

A main advantage of considering skills, and not materials, to be the curriculum basis is that teachers can be confident they are emphasizing permanent learning tools, rather than bits and pieces of factual information which students may retain only temporarily. Also, with an emphasis on skills, teachers can provide specific, related activities that pertain to just one skill or one aspect of a skill, such as one consonant blend or one context clue. Without skills as a focal point, teachers tend to provide general activities that deal with more than

one skill and require the students to perform unrelated tasks.

Another advantage of skill-based instruction is that teachers can draw from a variety of instructional sources and not be tied to a single set of teaching suggestions. A teacher may, for example, adapt lessons from several basal readers and use commercial games and kits to teach a particular skill. In other words, teachers are free to choose the most appropriate activities for their students' skill instruction. They do not have to depend on one set of activities, which may impose rigid guidelines and sequences.

Disadvantages of a materials-based curriculum. When materials instead of skills are viewed as the instructional framework, emphasis is inadvertently shifted away from reading skills and towards content. Teachers are concerned with "getting through the book" or covering a certain number of stories and exercises instead of teaching usable skills. With less time for intensified skill instruction, more skills are likely to be taught simultaneously to large groups of students with diverse needs. As a result, little concentrated skill instruction occurs, and less attention is given to students' individual needs.

Another disadvantage of a materials-based curriculum is that the basal reader is taught independently from skills. As a result, activities are often repetitive and lacking in continuity. They do not coordinate with or reinforce each other and do not help the students relate one lesson to the next.

When parts of the reading curriculum, for instance the basal reader and specific skill instruction, are taught independently, the curriculum is fractionated. Ideally the reading curriculum should be unified so

that all parts relate and reinforce one another. To have a single unified curriculum, skills must be the basis, and materials must be adapted to fit the teachers' and students' needs.

Selecting a skill-centered approach. After school planners have made a commitment to teaching skills, a specific set of skills and teaching procedures that are appropriate to the local setting must be identified. Because Wisconsin Design skills and recommended procedures have been widely used and accepted by elementary school personnel, they provide a sound framework for designing the curriculum. We recommend that the administrator(s) and either a specially chosen reading committee or, preferably, the whole staff review the Design skills, objectives, and teaching manuals to determine necessary adaptations for their local setting. These decisions usually take into account which aspects of the reading curriculum teachers find most important. For example, some teachers do not teach the schwa skill in word attack; they may reverse the sequence for teaching long and short vowels; they may teach a Level C skill at Level B, or they may add a vocabulary skill and objective of their own to the Design comprehension element.

For administrators and teachers to select a specific approach together is important because school personnel must feel that they have taken an active part in deciding the skills and objectives to be adopted. In cases where this step is overlooked, and an administrator simply announces to the staff on short notice that a certain set of skills "will be taught," teachers feel left out, and are not inclined to assume responsibility for teaching the skills.

A new approach means change. As teachers commit themselves to a

skill-centered approach and select skills to be taught, they will see that changes in the curriculum and in their teaching procedures are in order. At this point it is critical that the planners have prepared themselves for undergoing change and are ready to help the whole staff through the change process. Because schools have given so little attention in the past to the educational change process, we will discuss its importance in some detail.

Attention to Principles for Change

When school planners are facing change within their school, we recommend that they pay close attention to principles for educational change. We base this recommendation on our experiences in observing teachers and administrators recognize and solve initial Wisconsin Design implementation problems. Through our numerous interviews with school personnel, we were impressed by the fact that teachers view the systematic teaching of reading skills as a significant innovation or, at least, as a departure from the pattern of teaching previously followed in their schools. In view of this perception and of the prominence the recent literature gives to the highly complex process of adopting an innovation (that is, planning, undergoing, and evaluating changes within schools), we have concluded that many of the problems that appear to be associated with the skill-centered approach are, in fact, attributable to difficulties in undergoing the change process, itself, without adequate preparation or training.

Rationale for emphasizing the change process. With better perspective for viewing the change process and preparation for making the

necessary personal changes, teachers may find the implementation process less disconcerting. They may be better equipped to establish and teach skills as the basis of the curriculum, to attain the flexibility needed for planning and scheduling, to establish a cooperative atmosphere for sharing ideas and materials, to decide how much testing is essential, and to integrate the teaching of all skills into the total curriculum.

Selected principles for change. To prepare themselves and their staff for implementation, school planners should incorporate principles for change into their daily implementation strategies. Below we have presented some principles, which are essentially common sense guidelines, based on the Zaltman, Florio, & Sikorski (1977) list. These principles represent a cross-section of the many elements of change identified by field study investigators. They are presented by categories based on skill-centered implementation procedures.

Change and goals

- Recognizing the need for change is essential for creating change. Teachers must be convinced of a need in order to make the necessary sacrifices and assume the risks involved.
- The goals of a change program should be stated very explicitly so that staff members know what to expect and have a sense of direction and purpose.

Involvement and planning

- Securing staff members' commitment and involvement is important to a successful implementation.
- Planning for change should be done in such a way that failures cannot be attributed to any one individual. Greater risks

will be assumed by staff members if they feel they are free from blame by their peers and administrators.

- Resistance should be expected and planned for when change is introduced. Reluctant staff members should be highly involved in the change process.
- Staff members should (a) have their feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about their performance minimized, and (b) see their burdens as decreasing rather than increasing.
- Users must be involved in the change (e.g., make decisions) to feel committed to it and to take responsibility for it.

Communication

- Providing a formal time for effective communication about program planning is necessary, since staff members' daily encounters (for example, break times) are insufficient to transfer specific knowledge of implementation procedures.
- Preparing staff members for change--by training them in the use of the materials and by discussing the new procedures to be used--is important to their gaining confidence and a positive attitude about using the new program.
- Pacing implementation comfortably for all staff members is important in establishing feelings of success at the beginning of implementation and in avoiding many frustrations.
- Piloting the new program on a small scale--before it is introduced on a widespread basis--is helpful in planning a smooth implementation.

- Observing changes in other schools can provide new knowledge and incentive to staff members reluctant to participate.

Evaluation

- Evaluation of change is essential for positive change. It should fit local needs and uncover both favorable and unfavorable, but unanticipated, outcomes.
- Frequent feedback from peers and administrators is necessary for staff members to determine progress.
- Staff members should be rewarded for changing current practices, "daring to be different," and trying new procedures.

We recommend that in planning implementation, school planners adapt these principles to their own situation and use them as a basis for their strategies. With an increased emphasis on establishing good communication and relationships among staff members, implementation of a skill-centered approach should be easier and less disconcerting than if little or no attention is given to the change process.

Whole-staff Involvement in the Whole-school Reading Program

In this section we continue to discuss beginning strategies for implementing a skill-centered approach to reading instruction. Our emphasis is on involving the total staff in the whole-school reading program. We stress the importance of holding inservice sessions to both inform teachers, thoroughly familiarizing them with specific materials, and to involve them, pointing out the changes they will

need to make, such as working as a team and participating in making decisions. We also present issues which teachers typically face during implementation, particularly at the beginning. We explain how school planners can resolve these issues by including them in inservice work and by following principles for change.

Inservice Sessions

Most school staffs we have observed using a skill-centered approach to teaching reading have been provided with some form of inservice work when they began to teach the skills. The inservice sessions usually familiarized the teachers with the specific materials to be used. In almost every situation, however, additional inservice work is needed. The additional work should not only continue to offer a strong emphasis on the program's components, but two more aspects of inservice work which are generally neglected. One aspect is continuing work to inform and update experienced staff and new personnel and the second is offering information about personal changes teachers will need to make as they become involved in skill-centered instruction.

Inservice sessions to inform. To offer effective instruction, teachers must be thoroughly familiar with the materials of the program they are using. If they are not knowledgeable, they are likely to feel frustrated, overwhelmed, and apprehensive, and ultimately acquire a negative attitude. To gain confidence, teachers need to be able to fit new materials into their regular teaching sequence, to understand how new materials can be adapted to individual students, and to see how reading skills relate to the rest of their curriculum. Without adequate

inservice work, teachers unfamiliar with the range of skills and objectives in an element will not be able to spontaneously reinforce the skills when opportunity arises in the teaching of other materials. Knowing the skills well enough to reinforce them and tie them together in various content areas is an excellent teaching device. Teachers who lack adequate inservice training and are not well informed about skill-related materials tend to use them either the wrong way or not at all.

In the list below we present some ideas to help planners ensure that they provide adequate inservice work on the specific materials of their skill-centered program.

- Plan ahead. Be sure to request enough time and money for, say, holding a late summer workshop to key local materials into a resource file, consulting with an expert, visiting a school already using the Wisconsin Design, or buying supplementary materials.

- Introduce the materials before the teachers begin to use them. Plan the timing of the inservice work so each session does not last too long and the sessions are not always held after school. Shorter, more frequent sessions may be most effective, since teachers can begin to digest the information in between meetings, and not be deluged with all the details at once.

- Organize the sessions and keep them moving. Provide various formats, such as lectures (with time for questions and review of sample materials), small group discussions, filmstrips, and simulations. Unstructured meetings are boring and confusing.

- Be flexible. Adjust the pace of the work to the teachers' needs. For example, space several short sessions far enough apart to allow the teachers to begin implementation procedures in between sessions. Actual practice is ideal for reinforcing workshop ideas, and teachers will have better questions and real concerns after they have a little experience. Include time for reviews.

- Encourage participation to ensure teacher involvement. For instance, teachers could devise their own grouping strategy. Ask teachers for solutions to various problems such as providing all students with an opportunity to use creative reading skills. This will get them thinking about the entire scope of implementation and not just the day-to-day difficulties.

- Schedule frequent follow-up inservice sessions. Follow-up work is critical--for both experienced and new staff--in order to identify problems as they arise. This work is an integral part of maintaining the Design and is discussed in the section dealing with the whole-school reading program.

Inservice sessions to involve. This aspect of inservice work is generally overlooked. School planners typically put emphasis on informing teachers about the materials, but do not tell them that implementing the Design will bring about changes in both their personal teaching styles and in the curriculum. We strongly urge planners to include this aspect of inservice work, because we believe that a majority of implementation problems are caused by teachers being unprepared for the changes they need to make.

For example, teachers need to know at the beginning of implementation, before bad habits are formed, that a great deal of team effort, planning, working together, and sharing will greatly increase their effectiveness. They need to feel supported in their efforts, and to know that no one thinks making changes is easy or can be done over night. They need to realize that they will be expected to make decisions about students' instructional needs and to monitor and record individual student's reading progress. They should expect that their general level of instruction will be more complex than before; for instance, they will form various skill groups and teach different levels of materials. Consequently, they will need to plan ahead and work together. They should realize that they cannot teach skills on an individual basis all alone--they need help from each other.

Our recommendation is that this emphasis on the necessary changes be incorporated into the normally provided inservice work. Discussion of changes can be included in conjunction with specific work on materials. In addition, regular informal discussions can be scheduled where teachers voice their concerns and suggest procedures they would like to try. In the following paragraphs, we talk about some common initial implementation issues. We recommend that these issues be dealt with in appropriate inservice sessions.

Implementation Issues

An implementation issue usually develops because a group of people differ in their reactions to proposed new procedures. The development of issues is natural in change, but an administrator must resolve

disagreements immediately to put the group at ease.

In many schools where issues have developed at the beginning of implementation, school personnel have not immediately addressed or resolved them. The issues have then become larger, as time goes on, and quite controversial for both teachers and administrators. To avoid the buildup of this type of controversy, we recommend that school planners recognize and resolve issues in their initial inservice work, before implementation patterns are firmly established. Addressing the issues is not necessarily complicated or difficult; often merely recognizing or informally talking about a concern is enough to resolve it. We will discuss three typical issues arising in the initial stages of skill-centered reading instruction.

Pacing implementation steps. Proceeding with implementation steps (such as introducing different skill areas, trying various skill grouping patterns, developing the local resource file) at an appropriate pace is important if teachers are to feel comfortable with their instruction, maintain a positive outlook, and keep unnecessary frustrations to a minimum. In a number of schools we saw instances where teachers and students were overwhelmed by having too much to do at once, and not knowing enough about the materials with which they were working. They simply had been rushed at too fast a pace. A good pacing guideline for administrators is to start slowly and adjust the implementation process to the teachers' and students' needs. The chances for a successful implementation in the long run are much greater if the staff enjoys success at the beginning. The pace can pick up after everyone is accustomed to the procedures.

Because many administrative personnel are not sure which implementation steps, if carried out too quickly, seem to cause concern for teachers, we have listed a few examples.

- Introducing different skill areas. Each teacher should become familiar with all of the materials and skills related to one skill area before beginning to teach the skills in a second area. Pacing the introduction of areas frees the teachers from feeling rushed to cover a large number of skills, and allows them to focus instruction on a few select skills and become familiar with them. Because this step is critical throughout implementation, we discuss it in detail in the section, Refining the Whole-school Reading Program.

- Developing a teacher's resource file. Contributing activities to a resource file and keying in local materials is an excellent way for teachers to learn about the skills and objectives. It is a substantial job for any one of the skill areas, however, and development should be limited at first. For example, specify a set number of activities to add per skill, or select only specific library materials to key. Continue development at a later stage of implementation, when teachers realize the value of building a good resource file.

- Scheduling. Advise teachers to keep schedules simple at first. Work out one easy skill grouping routine, say, for three weeks. Each teacher might plan to form not more than three skill groups during the reading period, and have the students change rooms only one or two times. Stick to this schedule until it is familiar and needed changes are obvious. Suggest that weekly planning meetings focus only on one or two problems at a time, instead of covering the entire range of implementation concerns.

- Teaching skills in the content areas. At first, suggest that teachers concentrate on teaching developmental activities and only planning for application. After they have organized the developmental phase of instruction and are familiar with the skills, they can direct students in application to real life circumstances. This guideline is useful because teachers must know the skills in order to provide for application. It is only general, however, since some students are ready to apply skills right at the beginning.

- Measuring skill growth. The importance of evaluation is discussed in the next two sections of this chapter, the Whole-school Reading Program and Refining the Whole-school Reading Program. We mention it here, however, as a good example of an implementation step that can be taken too soon. Before any informal or formal measurement of skill growth is done, school personnel should be committed to teaching skills for several years. That is, a skill-centered approach to teaching reading must have a chance to work smoothly for a while before change in students' skill growth can be expected. Administrators who wish to obtain overnight results will be disappointed and should not use the Design on that basis.

Before any measurement of skill growth takes place, teachers should be comfortable with each other, know the implementation procedures, and not feel distrustful of the administration. They should be involved with recording and retrieving the data, as well.

- Problem solving. Another issue concerns solving problems as they arise. In a number of schools, teachers' individual and group implementation difficulties may go unresolved for long periods of time, usually

becoming greater as the weeks go by. At several successful implementation sites, however, we observed that most of the implementation problems were addressed immediately by administrators and the teachers. Although the solutions were not always quickly found, at least the staff members expressed their concerns, released their tensions, and did not let their problems mount. In these school settings administrators had established a "problem solving mechanism," a way for teachers to vent their frustrations and suggest alternative practices. For example, one mechanism consists simply of assigning one or two teachers the responsibility for identifying difficulties and initiating action to resolve them.

Perhaps the best way to identify problems as they arise is to encourage teachers to take their own initiative in pinpointing areas of concern and in proposing alternative procedures. Teachers are apt to do this if school planners have followed such principles for change as involving the teachers in planning and in making decisions. The teachers' involvement makes them feel responsible and committed. With a feeling of commitment, the teachers are naturally interested in removing roadblocks. If, on the other hand, teachers feel uninvolved with their skills program, they will not take interest in solving implementation problems and, in fact, they may instead create them. An administrator will then have to closely monitor the teachers' procedures to see that difficulties get ironed out.

Our suggestion is to combine the two problem solving mechanisms mentioned above. That is, in addition to encouraging teachers to take their own initiative, appoint one or two persons to provide consultation to each teacher. These consultants can help in selecting appropriate

instructional levels for students, giving tests, finding skill activities, and grouping students. She or he can field teachers' questions about implementation procedures and generally help identify those strategies that need improvement, those that do not, and some that might be suitable to try.

- Scheduling: Planning time and progress reports. Not unrelated to the problem solving issue is the matter of scheduling planning and evaluation time. Principals often feel they provide enough time for teachers to plan and evaluate progress and believe that much of this time is not used effectively. Teachers, on the other hand, claim that they lack adequate time for preparing instructional activities, planning future schedules, and evaluating implementation progress.

In many school settings both these situations exist. That is, teachers both need more time for planning and evaluation and need to use their time more wisely, for instance, regularly preparing an agenda for a staff meeting and sticking to it. The resolution to this issue will be different in every school setting, since the amount of planning and evaluation time needed and how it is used depends on the number of students and teachers, the teachers' and administrators' backgrounds, experiences in working together, and commitment to a skills approach. Despite this need for variability, two guidelines may be helpful to administrators:

- (1) Provide, regularly, an appropriate amount of time for teachers to talk together about their instructional program. When teachers are faced with increasingly complex instructional arrangements, they must have the opportunity to organize, coordinate, and evaluate current

implementation procedures. Schedule time for grade level, unit, and all-staff meetings. The amount of time should be determined by the school planners in the local setting.

(2) Devise a tactful method for holding the teachers accountable for their planning time. Expecting concrete outcomes (for instance, a written outline of the staff's accomplishments) from each meeting is unproductive, because then the teachers spend more time worrying than actually thinking creatively about teaching skills. If an administrator has given the staff members enough responsibility, and has supported and encouraged their efforts, they will have incentive to use their time wisely. The administrators and staff should feel they are working together to achieve a successful implementation.

• A final word. In this section we have presented some initial implementation strategies for school planners. We outlined guidelines for inservice sessions to both inform teachers about specific materials and to involve them in deciding necessary changes. We also identified a number of implementation issues which typically develop in school settings. These issues can be resolved relatively easily if addressed during the initial inservice work and not avoided until implementation patterns become firmly established.

Maintaining the Whole-school Reading Program

The emphasis in this third phase of implementing a skill-centered approach to reading instruction is on maintaining the whole-school reading program. Several of the strategies we discussed in the beginning

phases of implementation are presented here from a slightly different perspective.

Continuing inservice work is particularly important for maintaining a skill-centered approach, and we present several ideas for these work sessions. The role of skill application in the total implementation effort is explained in some detail to emphasize the importance of applying skills, and guidelines for incorporating application work into the regular instructional process are included. We also discuss the importance of evaluation and suggest both informal and formal strategies for school planners to adapt to their local setting.

Continuing Inservice Work

Continuing inservice work is essential to keep staff members abreast of current teaching, testing, and evaluation procedures. Inservice work should continue to emphasize the two purposes--information and involvement--that we have already discussed.

If local implementation is successful, it is continuously changing, the teachers are the ones making the changes, and the changes are regularly discussed at meetings of the whole staff. For example, as implementation progresses, teachers may discover instructional strategies they prefer, or they may decide a group of nine-year-olds no longer needs word attack instruction, or they may want to conduct more or less testing, or to express frustrations concerning unequal responsibilities. From the beginning, teachers and administrators should realize that continual changes and adaptations are a natural part of teaching skills on an individualized basis.

As an aid to school planners in preparing a tentative inservice

agenda, we have listed several inservice topics which frequently arise in maintaining a skill-centered approach. This list may be helpful at first as a source of ideas for school personnel who are not used to identifying potential concerns. As teachers become more experienced, however, they should be encouraged to identify their own problems and concerns, and to raise them in inservice sessions.

- Developing skills. Purpose: to promote sharing among teachers.

Ask some or all teachers to devise and present an activity for developing a skill. Request that the activity not be taken from a commercial set of materials, and not be a ditto worksheet.

- Applying skills. Purpose: to promote sharing and demonstrate the difference between development and application activities. Ask some or all teachers to present a non-ditto master activity or idea for applying a skill in a content area. Sessions focusing on application may be held frequently, since teachers must give skill application opportunities priority over most other skill activities. Frequent discussions about scheduling skill reinforcement activities in the content areas may be helpful.

- Testing skills. Purpose: to determine whether the right amount of testing is being conducted. Conducting the right amount of testing can be a difficult balance to strike. Teachers should share their experiences to learn whether they are doing too little (and not gathering enough information) or too much (the students are frustrated and the teachers have no time to teach). Delaying posttests is also a frequent concern.

- Use of instructional materials. Purpose: to learn about local resources. The librarian may want to make the teachers aware of the location of various materials, including new ones, in the school. She or he may also point out materials particularly effective with certain skills and students. Class schedules may be worked out to allow all students time in the library and give some students independent time to apply skills.

- Setting goals. Purpose: to help teachers maintain perspective, become better decision makers, and keep instruction on target. Allow the teachers time to reflect on their students' current achievements and establish long term goals for the reading program. Encourage teachers to make adjustments in their lessons accordingly. In addition, set specific and realistic short term goals with the teachers to help them manage instruction on a daily basis.

- Informing new staff. Purpose: to help new staff members become knowledgeable about their responsibilities. New staff members need specific, well organized input about local implementation procedures. They should not be expected to pick them up from their teammates. They need to feel involved and supported from the first day or they may quickly assume a negative attitude.

- Using specific materials of a skill-centered approach. Purpose: to help teachers rediscover the usefulness of a program's teaching and testing manuals. Very frequently teachers find they are unfamiliar with many helpful hints in the teacher's planning guides and teacher's resource files. They find that when they initially read or skimmed these materials, they were inexperienced and the ideas did not have meaning

for them. Taking time to review, say, pretesting and grouping strategies or background concepts for comprehension and study skills can aid current instructional strategies. Also, the parts of these components which are useful on a daily, weekly or monthly basis should be pointed out.

- Identifying changing instructional needs. Purpose: to help teachers develop teaching strategies appropriate to their local setting. As implementation proceeds, students' relative skill growth may increase. For example, nine-year-olds may have more word attack skills today than five years ago in schools implementing a skill-centered approach for that length of time. In light of this skill growth, teachers must periodically reassess the types of skills and activities presented to students. For example, they might ask themselves, "Do the nine-year-olds need less word attack and more study skills and comprehension instruction?" "Should a great deal more emphasis be put on application activities?" "How do we do this?"

- Reviewing implementation procedures. Purpose: to help teachers develop implementation strategies appropriate to their local setting. As teachers become experienced in teaching skills, they may want to alter procedures established at the beginning of implementation. For example, they might want to schedule more planning time between different skill groups to allow for accurate assessment and preparations. Teachers are frequently concerned with "covering" a certain number of skills during the year and they schedule skill group cycles accordingly, not allowing enough time to organize development and application. Having this time is essential for effective instruction.

• Individualizing across the total curriculum. Purpose: to encourage teachers to use their common sense when planning individualized skill instruction. As teachers become sophisticated in the mechanics of skill-based instruction, their attention shifts to the quality of instruction. Some teachers may try to individualize their instruction across all the content areas. These teachers should be reminded that too much homogeneous grouping is repetitious for the students, and that some heterogeneous activities offer a nice balance to the daily routine. Teachers can vary their instructional approaches by offering a combination of focused instruction to skill groups (from one to three times per day), large group instruction, and heterogeneous groups, and then varying the activities (independent and teacher-directed) within each one. Teachers should attempt to differentiate instruction to the best of their abilities, but always within the specifications of the local setting.

Skill Application

In this stage of maintaining a skill-centered approach, providing for application of all the skills is one of the most important steps. Until recently, this step has been frequently omitted from local implementation schemes. The reasons for not including it as a natural follow-up to developmental work are mainly that few commercial instructional materials discuss the role of application in skill retention and use, and they do not suggest appropriate application activities for teachers to use in the content areas. To clarify the significance of skill application in the total implementation effort, we discuss application strategies here in some detail.

Purpose. Having the opportunity to use skills in real life situations enables students to recall the skills spontaneously in circumstances outside the classroom. When students understand why they are learning skills, they are apt to view their developmental skill work (which is usually repetitive and done on work sheets) in better perspective.

Application activities. When we use the term, "application activity"--as opposed to "developmental activity"--we refer to an activity which emphasizes the students' independent use of a skill. An example of an application activity is directing a student to go to the library to find a book, which he or she will have to first locate in the card catalog. In a developmental activity, on the other hand, the emphasis is on learning about the skill in teacher-directed lessons, which are not usually real life circumstances. An example of a developmental activity is instructing students to underline on a worksheet the titles of books that could be found in a De-Dye card catalog drawer. Not all development and application activities are as distinct as these examples, but the teacher should keep the differences in mind and be sure to provide both types of activities during instruction. Additional examples are provided in Figure 1.

Recently, teachers have begun to see numbers of students who have "mastered" skills on posttests but are not able to use the skills even a short time later. The entire instructional process suddenly seems questionable, and teachers ask questions and make comments, such as, "How can I be really sure that the kids can use what I teach? How do I provide for application? I don't have access to any application activities. And, I don't have the extra time to teach the activities,

SKILL	DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY	APPLICATION ACTIVITY
1. Word Attack: Level C Blends	Circle one of several blends, based on a nonsense word pronounced by the teacher.	Read a story out loud to the class or a small group.
2. Study Skills: Level G Outlining	Underline the one of several phrases which is a suitable subheading for the second paragraph of the story on the handout.	Outline a science chapter (assigned for homework).
3. Study Skills: Level E Directions	Fill in the dot (on a hypothetical map) that is northeast of the large <u>X</u> .	Plan a treasure hunt in the school for a group of students, by giving them only intermediate directions from one location to the next.
4. Comprehension: Level B Central thought	Circle the topic of the paragraph on the handout.	Read a paragraph in a <u>Weekly Reader</u> or recreation book and decide the topic of it.
5. Comprehension: Level F Reasoning	Underline the indirectly stated relationship in a paragraph on a worksheet.	Listen to a TV ad and determine whether the conclusion drawn is reasonably based on the information.

Figure 1. Examples of developmental and application activities.

much less to prepare them." In response to these concerns, we have identified some guidelines for administrators who are hoping to incorporate skill application into their implementation scheme.

- Create an awareness of the importance of applying skills. Be sure all staff members realize the importance of providing students with opportunities to use the skills they have been taught. Point out the differences between development and application activities. Encourage teachers to consider skill application a priority from the beginning of implementation, even though carrying out application activities for all skills will have to be implemented slowly (so as not to seem overwhelming).

- Combine development and application work in skill groups. In order for students to retain and apply a skill on their own, they must have opportunities to use it when initial instruction is offered. To help students retain their skills, teachers need to first offer developmental instruction, and then follow up with opportunities to use the skills. For example, (a) after students study a particular consonant blend, they could read a story, point out the blends, and pronounce the words; (b) after learning a comprehension sequence skill, students could be assigned to determine the order of events in a chapter or paragraph from their social studies text; or (c) after studying intermediate directions in study skills, the teacher could assign the students to follow directions which would lead the students to a specific location.

- Strike a balance between development and application preparation. Focusing on skill application does not necessarily mean increasing the amount of teacher preparation and skill instruction. The time that

teachers spend devising and incorporating application activities into the regular skill group work may well be made up when teachers no longer have to spend as much time reteaching developmental skills that students forget. In addition, many application activities can be made up on the spur of the moment, take a relatively short time for students to complete, and offer a change of pace. An example might be directing students to describe the locations of their homes in terms of intermediate directions.

- Use the skills in the content areas. Although teachers may initially object to coordinating reading skill group and content class schedules, the importance of following developmental work with systematic skill application in different contexts cannot be overemphasized. Hopefully, an increased trend toward teaching word attack, comprehension, and study skills in the content areas in elementary school may improve students' use of these skills at the secondary level, when less emphasis is on learning to read and more is on learning factual information.

One reason teachers have difficulty with systematic application of skills in the content areas is that scheduling can become complicated. For example, if skills are taught during the reading period, then the students and teachers in those skill groups need additional time together in a content class. The reason is that teachers can find more opportunities in content classes to reinforce and apply skills if they are aware of the skills students are developing in the reading group. Since teachers generally do not examine record cards in a content class to determine the students' skill status, they provide most content application activities spontaneously. If the teacher is unaware of the

students' skill attainment (the students have been in another teacher's reading skill group), the tendency is not to focus on skills, in order to avoid either too repetitive or too advanced skill instruction.

Another reason to schedule the students from a reading skill group and their teacher together for a later content class is that the teacher can be sure to present a skill differently than before. Sometimes students react positively to a change of atmosphere, approach, and materials, and can quickly grasp a skill with which they were previously in a rut.

The schedules to accommodate similar groups of students and teachers in a reading class and in a content class do not need to be complicated. Frequently, they are simply different from what the teachers are accustomed to; once teachers become familiar with them, they can be easily worked out.

If, however, a staff finds the schedules difficult, administrators should suggest a different plan. One alternative is to plan to teach the skills only in the content classes. In other words, skill groups may be formed, based on the students' skill needs, in, say, a social studies class (as opposed to a separate reading skill group). The teacher will initially develop a set of skills (say, map skills), and later direct students to apply them. In a similar setup, science, math, and language arts teachers may teach graph and reference skills. Either approach is a suitable way to teach skills in the content areas, and school personnel should select the one most appropriate to their local setting.

- Encourage application of known skills before introducing new skills. Students who have mastered a skill (achieved 80% on a criterion-referenced test) should first have the opportunity to apply the skill to materials at their independent reading level, and then, possibly, to more difficult reading materials. Only then should another new skill be introduced. Using skills on increasingly difficult and varied text materials is a significant factor in improving students' reading ability, because students accumulate experience in using the skills in different contexts. In general, teachers should not worry about students overusing a skill, but they should be concerned about overdeveloping a skill, which occurs when no application opportunities are provided.

- Use inservice sessions to encourage skill application. Have teachers discuss the problems they encounter in providing for application, for instance, scheduling and devising activities. Encourage teachers to share ideas and strategies for using the various skills. Talk about learning the skills well and spontaneously reinforcing them in the content areas. Emphasize spur of the moment activity and discourage worksheets. Suggest alternative plans, such as scheduling a week between skill group cycles when students do nothing but use skills in a variety of situations. This scheduling can help establish the priority of skills application.

- Discuss word attack skills. Providing application activities for word attack skills is easy because whatever students read, they must "decode." Suggest that students read aloud from content area material. For example, they might do a science assignment during a word attack skill group to demonstrate to themselves and to the teacher

that they know how and when to use word attack skills.

- Discuss comprehension skills. Students need practice using comprehension skills on a variety of materials (basal reader, content texts, newspapers). The best way to use a comprehension skill may change from one subject area to another; getting the central thought from a short story differs from interpreting a science paragraph. Repeated practice will help the students learn what techniques help most with different materials. Because using the comprehension skills in a variety of contexts is so important, teachers should not introduce them too rapidly. They might have to take as much as a year to help students become as automatic as possible when applying the skills (Otto & Kamm, 1977).

- Discuss study skills. The recommendations for teaching study skills are similar to those for comprehension skills. Teachers should not introduce the study skills as quickly as students can pick them up. They are better taught at a much slower pace. For example, during one year a teacher might introduce only a few study skills and emphasize their use in one or more content areas. Introduction of new skills would not occur until students had plenty of opportunity to practice the ones they already knew.

- A final guideline. One guideline should be observed above all the others: Pace the introduction of the application strategies according to the teachers' abilities. Incorporate application work into the regular instructional process gradually, so the teachers do not become overwhelmed and frustrated, before even getting started.

Frequent inservice sessions can provide time to share application

ideas, encourage creativity, and allow teachers to build a small activity file. Teachers should practice at the beginning with a few well known skills, before attempting to have students apply all the skills at one or more levels. Ultimately, using skills in the content areas should become as integral to skill instruction as developing new skills.

One of the first steps is to get the teachers well acquainted with the skills and objectives--at least at two or three levels in one element. Once the skills are familiar, teachers acquire confidence in teaching them, and may feel ready to tackle something new, something other than devising more worksheets!

Evaluation

In implementating a skill-centered approach to teaching reading, evaluation is one of the most important procedures. Zaltman, Florio, and Sikorski (1977), for example, provided some evaluation principles for educational change which we have summarized: No program of change should be initiated without a well-developed plan for its evaluation. The plan should include a feedback system to identify performance gaps and assess the impact of change.

Although most educators recognize the value of evaluation, many schools lack a plan to determine the effectiveness of their skill instruction. Perhaps teachers and administrators do not know how to carry such a plan out. The purpose of this discussion is to show that effective evaluation can be done easily and on a small scale, and that it is invaluable to successful implementation. We will discuss both informal and formal procedures appropriate for school personnel to use.

Informal evaluation. Informal evaluation should be viewed as a constructive part of the teaching process. It can help both administrators and teachers to easily and quickly gain information on how implementation is progressing. One or more of the following strategies may be used to carry out informal evaluation.

- Use a questionnaire. Both teachers and administrators can gather pertinent questions for an inservice session or weekly meeting. The questions should be short and to the point, so that they can be easily interpreted and answered by the staff members. This form of feedback may provide a way to communicate certain problems that are difficult to discuss, such as concerns about staff cooperation and sharing of materials and ideas.

Informal evaluation can be carried out in any manner that is acceptable to the local staff. The point is, it should be done. As evaluation is gradually established as an integral part of the implementation process, teachers find it easier to do and begin to recognize how it increases the effectiveness of their instruction.

- Establish a problem-solving mechanism. Another form of informal evaluation is to establish a problem-solving mechanism in the school. We discussed this mechanism as one of the three implementation issues in the second section of this chapter. If teachers have a strong commitment to a skill-centered approach, they can be encouraged to assume the responsibility and initiative for solving the problems that arise. This approach is far more effective than if administrators try on their own to resolve the issues that develop, because the teachers, themselves, become highly involved. When the teachers meet to discuss

their problems, they are engaged in one of the best forms of informal evaluation--getting feedback from each other. Also learning on the spot what works and what does not is a sound way to address problems as they arise--when they are small--instead of later, when they are larger.

- Provide feedback. Every teacher needs reinforcement on a regular basis. Teachers who are going out of their way to cooperate, work hard, and take responsibility for teaching skills need recognition from their peers and administrators in order to feel that their efforts make a difference. If they do not receive this recognition, or, if they get the same acknowledgment as those teachers clearly putting forth less effort, they soon begin to reduce their work load and assume a negative attitude, asking themselves, "Is it worth all my trouble, if no one is appreciative?"

Those teachers who are not performing satisfactorily need appropriate feedback, as well, since discussion may release pent up feelings that can cause negative attitudes. These teachers should not be simply left alone to perform poorly. Since their students are usually not receiving sufficiently focused skill instruction, the burden of catching them up falls on other teachers, who usually become resentful.

Formal evaluation. School personnel using objective-based reading approaches have long questioned how to assess their students' reading growth. On the one hand, it makes sense to rely on criterion-referenced tests which relate test performance to absolute standards, providing a test for each instructional objective. If a local school administrator has decided that attainment of a certain set of objectives is the goal

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for the students, certainly mastery of the objectives should be sufficient evidence of the students' reading growth.

On the other hand, school administrators must respond to parents and school boards, who are less familiar with criterion-referenced tests than norm-referenced tests. They want to use one familiar test which can tell them how their students compare with other students nationwide. A standardized test of achievement is "normed," so it can provide this information. The scores show how well students did in comparison to other students, but not how well they met a previously established criterion.

To clear some of the confusion between these two different types of tests, we have summarized several comments by Otto and Chester (1975) concerning the contrasts between them.

- Standardized tests. These tests generally overlap very little with a school's objectives of instruction, and, therefore, are not very useful as guides in planning instruction. Standardized tests are non-specific, often requiring skills or aptitudes that are influenced only to a limited extent by experiences in the classroom.

- Criterion-referenced tests. These tests have absolute overlap with the objectives of instruction, because the objectives are the referents for the tests. Criterion-referenced tests are helpful in planning instruction because they can be used to assess individuals' strengths and weaknesses directly.

To recommend a general testing program for individual schools is difficult, because schools are different sizes, have students of different abilities, and different budget and resources are available. Also,

local politics vary concerning the amount and type of testing that is acceptable. We have noted, however, that in schools where both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced testing are conducted, both teachers and administrators seem content. They report that this compromise situation works well because both parents and teachers have the information they need. Our only specific recommendation is that standardized testing, alone, not be the only form of formal evaluation. It simply does not give the teachers feedback regarding students' attainment of the individual reading skills, and therefore is of no aid in planning appropriate instruction.

In line with our suggestion to avoid using standardized tests alone to formally evaluate skill-centered reading, we recommend that school personnel take more advantage of available information regarding the results and use of criterion-referenced tests. Many administrators and teachers have reported that they would like to evaluate their skills program, but do not know how to proceed. In Figure 2 we have listed several evaluation plans for school personnel to use in demonstrating the effectiveness of their skills program and in assessing students' reading growth based on attainment of a specific set of instructional objectives. Beside each plan are suggested procedures for carrying out the plan. In addition, Figure 3 is a list of helpful hints for carrying out a formal evaluation which administrators may consult if they are unfamiliar with developing evaluation plans.

Sample Evaluation Plans

Suggested Evaluation Procedures

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| 1. Determine whether students' skill growth increased from fall to spring. | During the first year of implementation, record the number of skills each student has in the fall, according to the break-in testing results. Examine the profile cards in late spring and determine skills gained by each student. The information can be averaged by class or grade and displayed graphically. |
| 2. Determine whether the students have more skills than the students of five years ago, when the skill-centered approach was first implemented. | Record the average number of skills per student (by grade or unit), beginning in the spring of the first year and continuing each spring. Increases may be most dramatic after several years. Present the information on a separate graph for each grade or unit, so the differences between the first and fifth year are clearly shown. |
| 3. Determine which students (low, average, or high ability) are showing the most skill growth. | Determine each student's skill growth during one year. Report the average gains by class or unit and by ability group. Show comparisons within each class or unit, as well as by grade. |
| 4. Determine which students are receiving the most teacher-directed instruction. | Record the number of skill groups each student is in during one year. Report the average number according to ability levels and by class, unit, or grade. (In many settings teachers have discovered that they were teaching the average ability students by far the most. High ability students received very little direct skill group instruction.) |
| 5. Determine whether word attack, comprehension, or study skills are generally acquired first, which are "easiest," or which are ones with which students have the most trouble. | Design a card which requests information from the teacher regarding a skill that has just been taught. For example, the card might ask for the dates of the skill group, number of students in the group, the activities used to teach the skill, and whether or not the students caught on quickly to the skill. The cards can be duplicated, and distributed to each teacher, so that one card can be filled out and returned after each skill group is completed. At the end of the evaluation period the information on the cards must be tallied and interpreted, so that the teachers see the value of their record keeping. |
| 6. Determine what type of activities (e.g., worksheets, games) are used most frequently in teaching the skills. | This information can be easily gathered on the cards described in Procedure #5. The results may show that a variety of activities is greatly needed. |

Figure 2. Evaluation plans and procedures.

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1. Plan ahead. Do not attempt any evaluation unless a plan can be well developed ahead of time and all the needed data is indeed available for collection.
 2. Develop the plan. Decide what you want to know and how the information can best be obtained and collected.
 3. Involve the teachers. Describe the plan to them. Ask for their suggestions and what they would like to learn from the study. Try to allay their fears that they, themselves, are being evaluated. Explain their role and responsibilities in collecting the data, such as precisely recording test scores and dates of mastery, testing for each skill taught, or noting the resource file activities used and students' reactions to them.
 4. Monitor the evaluation activities. During the time when, say, the testing and/or instruction is taking place, check to be sure procedures are uniform. For example, if part of the plan is to administer delayed posttests, then the tests should all be given the same interval of time after instruction; all test scores should be recorded and reported on the same forms, and teachers' notes about resource file activities should be recorded in a uniform manner.
 5. Appoint one person the evaluation consultant. If possible, assign one person the responsibility for carrying out the plan, especially if the teachers are highly involved. The teachers need to be reminded of the evaluation procedures they are to follow. They feel more comfortable if they consult with one person concerning their questions and problems.
 6. Collect and analyze the data. Collect data as it becomes available. Do not expect the teachers to hold on to a pile of data for months at a time. Do partial analyses, if possible, in order to produce some results. Try to keep the teachers interested.
 7. Share the results. When the data are finally all collected, try to publish the results as soon as possible. Explain them fully to the teachers and invite parents to listen, as well.
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Figure 3. Helpful hints for carrying out an evaluation plan.

Refining the Whole-school Reading Program

In this stage of "fine-tuning" implementation procedures we have identified three procedures of particular importance in a skill-centered approach to teaching reading. These procedures are pacing, teaching reading skills in the whole-school curriculum, and re-examining goals. At this stage, school personnel have gained some experience in teaching skills, and are familiar with, say, the mechanics of grouping and testing students. They may also have developed some fairly complex instructional arrangements that had not been used previously. Our discussion of pacing, teaching skills in the whole-school curriculum, and re-examining goals reflects the assumption that school personnel are well familiar with the day-to-day conduct of skill-centered teaching and are looking ahead to improving their procedures and, ultimately, students' skill growth.

Pacing

One of the procedures we discussed earlier was pacing implementation steps. An important implementation step is introducing different skill areas. This step should be emphasized in any school staff's refinement efforts.

Different skill areas should be introduced approximately one year apart. For example, if primary teachers use word attack the first year, they should wait until the next year to use comprehension or study skills, and another year before they introduce a third skill area. As each new set of skills is introduced, a complete inservice session on that skill area and the related materials is

critical. Implementation practices are different for word attack, comprehension, and study skills. Teachers need key activities and materials to the skills and objectives, and need to review the planning guides and resource files to be able to direct students.

Once teachers are familiar with all three skill areas and have implemented them, we recommend they pace the teaching of the skills. They should not teach skills in more than two areas on any one day. Instead, skill instruction should be paced by teaching one or two areas for a period of time, say, word attack and comprehension during October. Then a different set of areas should be presented, say, word attack and study skills during November. Alternating instruction in the skills in this way can also be done on a daily basis. However, this type of schedule is more demanding than the weekly or monthly one, and is not recommended for primary students. The main idea in alternating skill instruction is to prevent any teacher from having to prepare for and manage all three skill areas on a day-to-day basis.

Some administrators have found it convenient to initially implement one skill area (word attack) in the primary grades, and another skill area (comprehension) in the intermediate grades. This plan is suitable since it allows fifth and sixth grade students to be involved in the skill grouping. Care should be taken, however, that third and fourth grade teachers do not get caught in the middle, being required to teach both skill areas when they are not familiar with either. They need time to learn the materials and basic mechanics of a skill-centered approach first.

Reading Skills in the Whole-school Curriculum

In our previous discussion of application in the content areas we focused on getting teachers started in their efforts to have students use the skills they learn. In this discussion, we will emphasize refining the application strategies.

To improve application strategies, we recommend that administrators stress the teaching of reading skills in all parts of the curriculum. In a well-implemented skills approach, the skills will be integrated into the content areas so that they are initially developed through focused instruction. Later they will be applied where they are most useful. In some cases, a skill might be applied in several content areas; in others, it may be only relevant to one.

An administrator and staff might examine their list of skills and objectives to decide what skills, for instance outlining and note-taking, can be easily applied in more than one subject area. Students who use one skill in several subjects will be more likely to apply it independently to new situations, than if they associate the skill with only one subject or have never applied it at all.

We believe each local staff can make the best decisions, based on their own curriculum, regarding the assignment of skills to the various subject matter areas. In general, however, word attack, comprehension, and reference skills can be applied to all types of material. Map and graph skills have more limited use, finding most application in social studies, math, and science subjects. We emphasize the need for applying word attack skills outside the basal reader series to encourage students to use decoding skills in various

texts.

We do not recommend any specific procedures to help a school staff sharpen its application of skills in the content areas, but the following ideas will encourage teachers to remain confident and enthusiastic about skill application and seek program refinement on their own initiative.

- Continue holding frequent inservice sessions. Schedule a number of short workshops where teachers share ideas for applying skills in different content areas. Be sure all teachers participate. Discuss the different application strategies, such as tutoring, generation, oral language, and use of content area texts (see the Wisconsin Design Teacher's Resource File: Comprehension).

- Assign one person as a skill application consultant. This strategy may sound impractical, but it can provide teachers with support in their efforts to identify appropriate activities. The consultant might be in charge of organizing the file of application activities, helping teachers devise new activities, and identifying helpful materials in the library.

- Encourage students to think of ways to use the skills. Students can be valuable resources in determining the most useful application activities. Teachers or the reading application consultant might help students write down ways they think the various skills could help them. Add these ideas to the resource file.

- Refine and change schedules. Plans should be constantly modified to reflect teachers' needs. Explore alternatives when difficulties arise, such as having (a) all teachers teach all skills,

- (b) each teacher teach only certain skills, (c) teachers develop the skills in a reading skill group and apply them in a content area, or
- (d) the teachers teach skills only in particular content areas.

Re-examining Goals

Re-examining goals is an implementation procedure frequently overlooked. Based on interviews with teachers, reading specialists, and administrators in schools around the country, we found very few staff members were familiar with the goals of the local reading program. Our impression from the interviews was that both long term and short term goals of the reading program are not often discussed. We urge administrators who have not recently reminded themselves or their staff of their program goals to re-examine and possibly restate these goals together with their teachers and reading specialists.

We stress the importance of goal-setting because with both long term and short or intermediate goals consciously in mind, teachers can be better, more independent decision makers. If teachers are aware, for example, that for one group of students the aim is to learn all of the Wisconsin Design Level D Word Attack skills by mid January, and the aim for another group is to learn the Level D skills by June, and the aim for a third group is to become familiar with the Level C skills by March, then their teaching methods and activities can be better organized. Decisions such as whether it is prudent to reteach a skill to only a few students also become easier.

By keeping goals uppermost in their mind, teachers seem to gain perspective. Maintaining perspective in daily instruction helps

teachers decide what problems and decisions are minor and which ones recur often and need more attention.

The results of studies conducted by the Motivation project at the Wisconsin Research and Development Center should also encourage school personnel to set goals. The studies focused on the effect of setting short term goals with students, not with teachers, but we believe the results have implications for adults, as well. In the study, in a series of individual and group conferences, teachers discussed goals (such as mastering a certain skill) to attain with the students in, say, a week's time. In a majority of cases, dramatic gains occurred for the students when goals were set. Likewise, if short term goals are set at monthly staff meetings, teachers can concentrate on them and have a sense of direction for that period of time. Through group discussion, needless guilt feelings about failing to reach a certain goal may be alleviated. For instance, all teachers may agree that the month was "too busy with holidays" or "goals were set too high."

Re-examining and restating short term goals provides teachers with a measuring stick to help them focus their daily instruction and keep it in line with previously established long term objectives. Long term goal-setting gives teachers increased perspective, which, in turn, helps them become better and more independent decision makers.

Summary

This paper presents some practical strategies for implementing a skill-centered approach to reading instruction. The first two strategies

pertain to the beginning implementation stage: making a commitment to a skills approach, and paying attention to principles for educational change. We stressed the need for school personnel to make a conscious decision to make skills the basis of their curriculum, since in many school settings materials, instead, are the basis. In these settings teachers frequently have difficulty coordinating the teaching of skills and the use of various materials. The result is a fractionated reading curriculum. With skills as the basis, teachers can more easily achieve one, unified curriculum.

We discussed the importance of observing principles for change because we believe that current inservice work, which centers mainly on specific skill-centered materials, is inadequate. Teachers need to be better prepared for the personal changes in teaching styles, responsibilities, and management and instructional techniques that they must make to use a skill-centered approach.

In the section on whole-staff involvement in the whole-school reading program, we talked in detail about two kinds of inservice sessions--those to inform (pertaining to use of materials) and those to involve (pertaining to preparing teachers for change). We included several ideas to help school planners provide adequate inservice work for their entire staff.

We also discussed implementation issues that naturally arise in schools using a skill-centered approach, and presented three specific issues that commonly develop: pacing implementation steps, problem solving, and scheduling planning time and progress reports. We suggested that these issues can be resolved relatively easily if they

are addressed early instead of avoided until they become sources of major controversy.

Inservice work is also a topic at the third implementation stage. We emphasized the importance of continuing to develop the program and suggested some topics administrators might wish to cover in inservice meetings.

In this stage we also talked about skill application and evaluation--two strategies frequently underused in maintaining focused skill instruction. We explained the role skill application plays in skill retention, how it differs from developmental instruction, and why it must be an integral part of content area teaching. A number of ideas are presented to help administrators encourage teachers to provide opportunities in skill application practice for students.

We discussed both informal and formal procedures for evaluation, and offered ideas for carrying out either procedure. Not enough evaluation is currently being done and it is critical both for focusing and planning instruction.

In the last section we talk about refining the whole-school reading program and addressing experienced users of skill-centered approaches, who are accustomed to planning for a variety of instructional arrangements. We remind administrators to continue to pace their implementation according to the teachers' needs, and suggest ways to enhance the application strategies discussed earlier. The skills should be used in all parts of the curriculum, and the whole staff should re-examine both long and short term goals. These efforts will help teachers focus their instruction and to become more independent decision makers.

Combining all of these strategies and constantly improving them are the best ways to achieve a successful implementation of skill-centered teaching.

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